

Ohel's History of Covering Up Child Abuse in the Jewish Community:

A brief synopsis

This paper presents an overview of the allegations (mostly documented, some from witnesses) that have already been or are soon to be publicized regarding Ohel's three decade long involvement in covering up sexual abuse problems in the Orthodox community. It is not in any way meant to be exhaustive. Obviously, a thorough investigation of all of these problems, and of the inner workings of Ohel, its management, its relationship with the community leadership establishment, the rabbis, Child Protective Services, Kol Tzedek and the Brooklyn District Attorney, Agudas Yisroel, etc. is well beyond the scope of this paper. Likewise, absolutely no outreach was done to members of the community to come forward and give testimony about their experiences with Ohel. This is solely based on published materials from newspapers, news blogs, magazines, etc. and some firsthand accounts that were unsolicited.

The purpose of the paper is not to convict Ohel. I do not intend to be judge jury and executioner. It is merely an indictment that I believe any honest grand jury would agree to, that clearly raises enough questions to warrant further investigation and clarification. When it comes to the crime of child sexual abuse, there is too much at risk for the community to allow the problems in Ohel's history to simply be swept under the carpet because of the need to "protect an organization that has done so much good."

Furthermore, it is unlikely that the whole story will ever be told. Hundreds of employees and thousands of clients have passed through Ohel's doors and very few have been willing to speak openly to reporters trying to investigate Ohel for years. However, what is hoped is that an honest examination by the community, an open discussion, and an attempt to figure out what has gone wrong, can lead to recommendations for changes that can set the communal organization back on track, with new oversight and checks and balances in place so that the community can regain its confidence that children are being protected to the best of our ability.

I tried to write the history chronologically, but some stories are linked in a way that takes the reader out of the timeline in order to show ongoing patterns of behavior. Hopefully this will not be too confusing.

Covering up for therapists, employees and consultants who molest children:

1. In 1985, Ohel covered up its knowledge of Avraham Mondrowitz molesting scores of Jewish and non-Jewish children. Ohel was more concerned with the prospect of being sued for having referred vulnerable foster care children to "Dr. Mondrowitz" for therapy, than they were about warning the community of his danger. He fled from justice to Israel, where he remains a free man until this day.¹
2. When, over 20 years later, survivors of Mondrowitz's abuse and advocates finally convinced the Brooklyn DA (who also had helped in the cover up)² to extradite him, Ohel was silent about it for a long time. Finally, after being hounded by a respected news blog, they took a position which was according to their own press release, "not opposed" to his extradition.³ They offered zero support to any of the survivors or to any of the advocates who argued publicly for his extradition,⁴ and of course no apology for the role they played in sending kids to him or in covering it up twenty years earlier.

¹ Vosizneias.com. [Brooklyn, NY - Zev Brenner: COJO Told Me Not to Report Mondrowitz Two Decades Ago](#)

² Newsday, 5/28/03. [Tripping Up the Prosecution / Social pressure, refuge in Israel thwart sex-abuse cases](#)

³ Vosizneias. [OHEL Clarification: Mondrowitz Never Employed By Us, We Don't Oppose His Extradition, We Are Here To Help.](#)

⁴ Jerusalem Post: Why Avrohom Mondrowitz must be extradited [Opinion/Op-EdContributors/Article.aspx?id=128305](#)

3. In 1992 Simcha Adler, a counselor at Ohel molested and sodomized two brothers and in 1999 it was exposed that Ohel had not helped them prosecute, and therefore Adler walked free. The brothers, Michael and Robert, would like to be able to sue Ohel, but because of statute of limitations they can't.⁵ Ohel, of course, has vigorously opposed the Child Victims Act/Markey bill which would open a one year window for victims of abuse to go back and sue their molesters, and has offered "compromise bills."⁶

4. In September of 2010, when Andrew Goodman was arrested for molesting children in Brooklyn, and it was discovered that he was currently working at Ohel, although he was immediately fired,⁷ Ohel did no internal investigation about his activities while working there with a vulnerable population, and did not even send out letters to those he worked with to ask if he had acted in a harmful manner with them. Instead, they once again, chose to sweep the issue under the carpet, and we may never know if and how many people under his care at Ohel were abused by Goodman.

Covering up for rabbis and yeshivas who cover-up:

5. In 2000, Ohel proudly announced its new treatment program for child molesters, which was before it offered any treatment program for victims of abuse. The molesters were referred by community members, mostly rabbis, including after 2006, the Beis Din that Ohel helped found in Lakewood, NJ. This program was never seen by the rabbis as working in conjunction and cooperation with law enforcement, but rather as a way for the rabbis to avoid having to report molesters to the police even though in New Jersey, all adults are mandated reporters of child abuse.⁸

In 2009 the Jewish Week exposed the problem that this scenario left zero safeguards in place for the children of the community.⁹ Serial molesters like Stephan Colmer, Emanuel Yegutkin and dozens others were free to drop out of therapy at any time. Colmer did so, after local rabbis promised to give him "Torah therapy", and went on to abuse many more boys. While Ohel hides behind HIPPA regulations that shield the "patients'" confidentiality in defending why they have not warned the community of any of the predators they have treated,¹⁰ there is clearly no such legal justification for not warning the community about the rabbis who know about the molesters and do not report them to the police or warn the community. Instead, Ohel has honored and "worked closely" with these rabbis to gain referrals and to assist and abet in the illegal Beis Dins that cover up for the molesters.

When it was suggested to Ohel that they have molesters sign waivers to release information in cases where they do not comply with treatment and safety plans, CEO Mandel said that this information could then be subpoenaed, and therefore nobody would want to come to treatment.¹¹ In fact a judge in Lakewood ruled that otherwise privileged information contained in a clinical report by a therapist about an alleged child rapist would be admitted as evidence because the confessed molester had signed a waiver saying that the therapist could show the report to the Bais Din.¹² Why Ohel sees this highly desirable outcome as a bad thing is as mysterious as why the rabbis on the Bais Din, when seeing the report of the confession of rape, did not report it to the police themselves.

⁵ New York Post: [news/item_o47zOBb0Fkmy8FD42yvgUL#.ThCXPmi5fIU](https://nypost.com/2009/04/30/news/item_o47zOBb0Fkmy8FD42yvgUL#.ThCXPmi5fIU)

⁶ Vosizneias.com April 30th, 2009 [CEO Of Ohel: Compromise On Markey Bill Should Offer 1 Year Amnesty Plan For Perpetrators](https://www.vosizneias.com/2009/04/30/CEO-Of-Ohel-Compromise-On-Markey-Bill-Should-Offer-1-Year-Amnesty-Plan-For-Perpetrators/)

⁷ [Former Ohel Employee's Bond Set At \\$1 Million - FailedMessiah.com](https://www.failedmessiah.com/2010/09/01/former-ohel-employee-s-bond-set-at-1-million-failed-messiah-com/)

⁸ Asbury Park Press Editorial: Sex abuse cases must be reported to law enforcement. 8/23/09. Asbury Park Press Editorial: No exemptions for sex abuse. 9/14/09

⁹ Jewish Week, May 2009, [A Suspected Pedophile Eludes The System](https://www.jewishweek.com/article/a-suspected-pedophile-eludes-the-system)

¹⁰ [www.Ohelfamily.org. Child Sexual Abuse.](http://www.Ohelfamily.org/ChildSexualAbuse)

¹¹ unpublished Jewish Week interview

¹² Asbury Park Press, 5/18/11: Judge: Comments made by teacher charged with sex abuse admissible in court

6. Meanwhile, after the second expose by the Jewish Week in as many years about Ohel's sex offender treatment program¹³ and its criticism in a front page article in the New York Times,¹⁴ Ohel now finally admits that it has closed its treatment program down, and does not take referrals of child sexual abusers in search of therapy. But instead of advising rabbis that they should report to the authorities, according to an on the record (unpublished) Jewish Week interview now refers the rabbis to "private practitioners in the community," the very therapists told by Agudah rabbis to consult a rabbi before reporting.¹⁵

7. The Beis Din system that Ohel helped to create in Lakewood in the early part of the 2000's, has since closed in disgrace, but that has not stopped Ohel from promoting the "Rabbinic Vaad" idea as the way to handle child abuse in the community as opposed to recommending people call the police. In New Square, Ohel has helped set up such a Vaad.¹⁶ After recent violent criminal events in that community have brought it into the media spotlight and under federal investigation, there is reason to hope that the cover-ups perpetrated by this committee will finally be exposed.¹⁷

8. In 2006, when Yeshiva Torah Temima was exposed as having knowingly harbored a child molesting rebbe, Rabbi Yehudah Kolko, for decades,¹⁸ Ohel stood by the Yeshiva even as the DA did bring criminal charges against Rabbi Kolko, and the Yeshiva was sued for millions (the case is still pending).¹⁹ David Framowitz, the victim who first blew the whistle, placed multiple calls from Israel to David Mandel asking him not to allow Ohel to be used to cover for Rabbi Margulies, and clinicians at Ohel expressed deep reservations that it would be a bad idea, but to no avail, as CEO Mandel spoke about the issue of molestation in camps at YTT on an evening in which Professor Aaron Twerski defended Rabbi Margulies as an "honorable man," and not a word was spoken about the horrific abuse and cover-up recently exposed that had taken place in the same building. Mandel stated publicly that "An individual who abuses children and who participates in treatment can lead a successful life and be believed that they would no longer hurt children." When asked, in an interview the following day, whether such people could work with children again, Mandel *evaded* the question.²⁰ This, despite experts on child molestation maintaining that "sexual abuse is a learned, habituated behavior and is not curable."²¹

Covering up in foster care and clinical cases

9. Contrary to popular belief that Lieby Kletzky was the first Jewish child to be murdered by a Jewish adult, in 1992, Shulamis Riegler plead guilty to murdering her young son Yaakov, and was sentenced to eight years in jail.²² Her history of severe physical abuse of her children was well known to the community, and she had been forced to give up her children to foster care for years. However, Ohel, under communal pressure, and the child's pediatrician, agreed to let them go home to their mother despite the fact that she had stopped seeing her psychiatrist. When ACS was called yet again by the boy's school that was worried about serious physical injuries, they claimed they had referred the case to

¹³ The Jewish Week. [Abuse Case Tests Ohel's Adherence To Reporting Laws](#)

¹⁴ New York Times. October, 2009 [Orthodox Jews Rely More on Sex Abuse Prosecution](#)

¹⁵ The Forward 5/2/11 [Ultra-Orthodox Group Affirms Abuse Cases Go First To Rabbi](#).

¹⁶ The Jewish Star http://www.thejewishstar.com/detail.html?sub_id=1682).

¹⁷ [FBI said to join New Square arson investigation - News 12](#). www.news12.com. June 12, 2011

¹⁸ New York Magazine: [On the Rabbi's Knee](#)

¹⁹ NY yeshiva sued over 'sexual abuse' Michal Lando, the Jerusalem Post, New York 04/02/2008

²⁰ Jewish Week, June 16, 2006, Jennifer Friedlin: [Yeshiva In Sex Scandal Pledges More Protection](#)

²¹ Carich, M. Mussac, S. (Eds.), (2001). *Handbook for Sexual Abuser Assessment and Treatment*, Safer Society Press, Brandon, Vermont. (pp.2-3)

²² [Abuse Turns Fatal: How the System Failed -- www.nytimes.com](#) 2/10/92

Ohel, but there was never any follow up or oversight, resulting in the tragic loss of life of the young boy.²³

10. Shlomo Weiss went public with his story in an Emmy-award winning news segment on Channel 12 News.²⁴ Shlomo was regularly molested by his father as a child over the course of years. When he got divorced from his wife in 2001, and she got custody of their children, Shlomo wanted to make sure that his father would not have any access to them, and he went to court to protect the children from their grandfather. He wanted support in this endeavor and went to Ohel for help. The therapist who interviewed him told him that they had no services for survivors and that there was nothing that they could do for him. The therapist did not call the authorities, nor did they recommend he do so.

11. Rivkie K. was molested for years by somebody known to her family. She went to Ohel for services. Coming from Lakewood, her molester had been referred to Ohel for therapy and nobody had ever reported him to the police. She herself did go to the police but had trouble getting them to investigate her case because in Lakewood the police are slow to act against Orthodox child molesters. Her therapist did not advise her or support her in going to the police, and her molester eventually “escaped to Israel.”

12. Sara Rosenberg grew up in Pennsylvania in a family that fostered and adopted children through Ohel. Her parents, adopted two children with Down’s Syndrome through Ohel. Sara and her two siblings were all abused by her parents. She moved out of the house 15 years ago but her mentally retarded siblings, now adults, are still in the home, and Sara has reason to believe they are still being abused. In addition, her parents were given several other foster care children by Ohel over the years. About 4-5 years ago Sara informed Ohel about the abuse. She was told that there was nothing Ohel could do because the family is outside of NY (though the children were placed by Ohel for adoption outside of NY). She was also told that her brother’s file could not be located, and she was asked if she was sure that he was adopted through Ohel. She found this an odd question since her brother had been used in several full page advertisements of Ohel in the Jewish Press. She contacted David Mandel again in 2010 about the situation, after Ohel’s failures to protect children had begun to become more public. She received a response from Ohel’s lawyer by email that Ohel takes the allegations seriously and would investigate. She heard nothing further, so she emailed him again and received a response that Ohel was following up and will provide information to her to the extent permitted by federal and state confidentiality laws. This was the last she heard from anyone at Ohel about the situation. While the people involved are all adults and Ohel was only recently informed of the abuse, Sara believes that their apparent complete abdication of responsibility and lack of any offer to help her deal with law enforcement, etc. is illustrative of how they treat these kinds of situations more generally.

13. In 2009, a woman being treated at Ohel for emotional problems resulting from a history of child sexual abuse disclosed that she was molesting her young son. Therapists at first worked with her on a treatment “safety plan” to keep her child safe, but when that did not work, decided that child protective services needed to be called. However, their supervisor after consultation with Ohel’s lawyer, decided to tell the therapists not to report the mother. Within days, the mother had a breakdown that lead to a psychiatric hospitalization, in which she disclosed to the hospital workers, who did report it to ACS, that she had been molesting her son. When an investigation began, Ohel’s therapists were told not to cooperate with the investigators, but to refer all questions to their supervisors and Ohel’s lawyer.²⁵ The investigation lead to the finding that the boy was not safe living with the mother and he was removed

²³ [School Feared Borough Park Boy Was Victim of Abuse - New York Times 11/14/90](#)

²⁴ Channel 12 News. www.news12.com/articleDetail.jsp?articleId=260126&position=1&news_type=news

²⁵ Jewish Week [Abuse Case Tests Ohel’s Adherence To Reporting Laws](#)

from the house, the mother lost custody and parental rights, and she is only allowed supervised visitation with her son.²⁶

Covering up in speeches to the community:

14. Brooklyn – In September 2000 at a forum titled “Let’s Talk About What Never Happened, But It Did”, Ohel claims they brought the issue of sexual abuse “out from under the rug”. However, most of the survivors of abuse in the audience felt that this was just one more opportunity squandered to be open and honest with the community. First of all, there were no actual survivors to give testimony to “what never happened”. There were no professionals with any experience in treating them or hearing their stories. The speakers were rabbis who knew nothing about the issue. Rabbi Yisroel Reisman admitted as much, but said that he did know firsthand of two cases of abuse, which he emphatically pointed out were committed on “frum” Jews by “non-frum” neighbors and relatives, implying that frum jews don’t molest, effectively negating the experience of many of the survivors in the audience. Rabbi Reisman spoke about sexual molestation in terms of an evil inclination comparable to the Biblical story of Joseph’s temptation by his boss’s wife. He answered questions about the victims’ sense of betrayal by saying there is no reason to feel this way, because bad things happen to good people.

Rabbi Shmuel Kaminetsky told victims that they should not feel any shame about what happened to them because it was not their fault. However, when asked by a woman in an anonymously written question if she should reveal her childhood abuse to her husband of thirty, the Rosh Yeshiva said in no uncertain terms that she should not, because he would not understand it, and she should only talk to a therapist about it. At no point was there any discussion of prevention, of the communal safety that victims need in order to fully heal, of justice, or of reporting molesters to the authorities.

David Mandel, who is neither a licensed clinician or a trained psychotherapist, also stated that the majority of children molested go on to lead normal happy lives with no intervention. He said "It is the minority that end up needing some intervention," a statement that contradicts most current research.²⁷

There were many survivors who were retraumatized by feeling that these remarks were insensitive, lacking compassion, and even denying their experience. Some approached Mandel directly in tears and demanded an audience with the rabbis to “explain what really did happen.” One woman who is an incest survivor was crying and said she could not believe she had witnessed a gathering of Rabbis, whose goal was to address the issue of sexual abuse in our community, and in fact it was hardly discussed at all. “I feel betrayed and abandoned, by the very people who are supposed to support me”, she said.

15. Passaic - In 2008, Ohel was asked to address the community about child sexual abuse problems. On their own website they mention that this meeting was in response to the fact that a molester known to them, Stephan Colmer, had moved into the neighborhood. Nevertheless, they only told parents in the audience to talk to their children about good touch and bad touch. Indeed, only the rabbi of the synagogue where the event took place was responsible and professional and concerned enough about child safety to take the opportunity that night to publicly call on anyone who knows anything about any

²⁶ Jewish Week [Ohel Says Jewish Week Accusations ‘Unfounded’](#)

²⁷ Association between self-reported childhood sexual abuse and adverse psychosocial outcomes: Results from a Twin Study Elliot C Nelson; Andrew C Heath; Pamela A F Madden; M Lynne Cooper; et al *Archives of General Psychiatry*; Feb 2002; 59, 2; Research Library, pg. 139 [Childhood sexual abuse and psychiatric disorder in young adulthood: II. Psychiatric outcomes of childhood sexual abuse](#) DM Fergusson, L Horwood... - *Journal of the American ...*, 1996 [Aggression and Violent Behavior Volume 7, Issue 6](#), November-December 2002, Pages 567-589 KA Tyler - *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 2002 [Childhood Sexual Abuse and Adult Psychiatric and Substance Use Disorders in Women An Epidemiological and Cotwin Control Analysis](#) Kenneth S. Kendler, MD; Cynthia M. Bulik, PhD; Judy Silberg, PhD; John M. Hettema, PhD, MD; John Myers, MS; Carol A. Prescott, PhD *Arch Gen Psychiatry*. 2000;57:953-959.

case of molestation to go directly to the police. However, not only were Ohel professionals caught off guard by this statement that they themselves should have made, but they continue to intentionally exclude any mention of it in their reporting of the event on their website.²⁸

16. Baltimore – In April of 2007, the Vaad Harabanim of Baltimore published a letter signed by almost all the Orthodox rabbis in the city about the problem of sexual abuse. In it they said “that an abuser is to be considered a Rodef (literally a ‘pursuer’), effectively poised to destroy innocent lives and, therefore, virtually all means may be used to stop him and bring him to justice,” and they encouraged “the reporting of these crimes to the local authorities, who are most equipped to investigate and prosecute these complex claims.”²⁹

However, in February of 2008, the same rabbis hired Ohel as consultants to come and teach the community about keeping children safe. At a community meeting attended by over 500 parents and concerned adults, Ohel’s representatives once again refused to discuss the issue of child sexual abuse being a crime against children, and they did not make mention of law enforcement, child protective services, or criminal prosecution.³⁰

Furthermore, a “bootlegged” video that was publicized on YouTube shows CEO David Mandel talking about the need for parents to be careful not to always believe their children, and not to publicize allegations because there needs to be care taken not to “peer into shadows”. He talks about ways to get around the mandated reporting laws by making sure the perpetrator in cases of incest moves out of the house. He also ignores a question from the audience asking about reporting abuse to authorities in order to protect children.³¹

17. Woodmere and Lakewood. In 2010 Ohel was hosted at the Aish Kodesh Shul in Woodmere by Rabbi Moshe Weinberger, and a social worker gave a talk on protecting children from abuse, that in cases of abuse people should go to the police. The Jewish Star noted that Ohel’s announcement marked a change from their previous position of only one year earlier in an interview in the Jewish Press where they said that “there should be guidelines in place for those in the community to decide “when to use therapy and when to call in law enforcement.”³²

But in Lakewood, New Jersey, in the last year and a half, Ohel has had two programs to teach parents how to keep their children safe, and not only do they continue to avoid talking about the importance of reporting all crimes against children to the proper authorities, but they have an even greater impediment to child safety in that community. Instead of teaching parents to talk to their children about “good touch-bad touch” Ohel agreed to the rabbi’s insistence that only family pediatricians be in charge of having this talk with the children, because of the assumption that parents will find it too immodest to do so. At a recent meeting between with child advocates, Mandel boasted that this was huge progress for such a sheltered community as Lakewood.

Covering up through legislative initiatives:

18. Virtually all child advocacy groups supported The Child Victims Act, aka. The Markey Bill, that would extend the statutes of limitations on both criminal and civil cases of child abuse, and would open a one year window for old claims to be brought. Most religious groups supported giving victims of abuse their day in court and helping them expose molesters who are not known to the justice system. In the

²⁸ [www.Ohelfamily.org. Child Sexual Abuse.](http://www.Ohelfamily.org.Child%20Sexual%20Abuse)

²⁹ Baltimore Jewish Times, May 21, 2007: [Abuse in Our Community](#)

³⁰ Baltimore Jewish Times 2/29/08 [/index.php/jewishtimes/article/analysis_anti_child_molestation_meeting_fails/](#)

³¹ [youtube.com/watch?v=Soo67uqrseE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Soo67uqrseE)

³² Jewish Star 6/17/10 “Call the cops: Ohel recommends alerting the authorities” thejewishstar.com/detail.html?sub_id=1800

Orthodox Jewish community, The Jewish Board of Advocates for Children, Survivors for Justice, The Voice of Justice, and JSAFE, were joined by The OU, the RCA and the Iggud Harrabanim. Opposition to the bill that would hold institutions responsible for aiding and abetting child molesters, was led by the Agudath Israel, Torah Umesorah and the Catholic Church.

Ohel, as the organization that deals daily with vulnerable children should have been expected to fully support victims of child abuse and their advocates in vociferously lobbying with all its political weight for this important piece of legislation. However, once again Ohel took the side of the rabbis of the Agudah and Torah Umesorah over the safety of children. While it denied opposing the bill,³³ David Mandel wrote an op-ed offering a strange “compromise” that would give child molesters amnesty for their crimes if they confessed within one year (comparable to returning library books late) and would cap the amount of money that a victim of abuse could sue for no matter how badly he or she was damaged.³⁴ These ideas lead one leading advocate to remark that Mandel has no understanding of the pain suffered by a survivor of abuse or how much money is often spent on therapy bills alone.³⁵

19. One of the legal loopholes that Ohel continuously hides behind is the fact that in cases where they are not mandated to report, they claim they are not allowed to because of the confidentiality they owe to the sexual predators. The limitations of this protection have been debated by professionals.³⁶ To show good faith on the issue, Ohel published an ad in which aside from applauding itself for the work it has done to educate the community it insisted that it would like to be able to report more and it “would welcome expanded mandatory reporting laws”.³⁷

However, in another apparent contradiction, Ohel supported Agudath Israel as the only religious group to oppose a law in New York that would extend the mandated reporting law to include clergy as mandated reporters. Muslims, Protestants, Reform and Conservative Jews, Modern Orthodox Jews, and yes, even the Catholic Church supported changing existing laws to require clergy to report suspicions of child abuse to the authorities. But David Mandel warned that it is “premature” for our community to be expected to protect children in this way, and that most rabbis would probably break the law any way. He did not express the slightest outrage or did not “welcome” the prosecution of those rabbis who would break the law, perhaps because then Ohel would also be held accountable in the same way.³⁸

20. On the initiative of the Jewish Board of Advocates for Children’s Position Paper³⁹ that calls on the state legislature to mandate Jewish and other private schools to do fingerprinting and background checks and institute other safety protocols, Ohel has taken no position. Not one employee of Ohel has signed onto either the Yom Kippur Resolution or the online petition in favor of the position paper.

Covering up in educational materials:

21. As part of its mission to protect children in the community, Ohel spent thousands of dollars on an educational videotape that it proudly announced would help teach the community about child sexual abuse and give guidance about what needs to be done. The video described the psychological impact of the problem, and repeatedly noted the importance of awareness and treatment, but it never mentioned

³³ Jewish Star, 4/26/09 [Ohel denies it will oppose bill to allow victims in old cases to name abusers \(UPDATE\)](#)

³⁴ Five Towns Jewish Times. Mandel, D. (April 29, 2009) Sexual Abuse Legislation: A Proposed Strategy for Reform.

Vosizneias.com April 30th, 2009 [CEO Of Ohel: Compromise On Markey Bill Should Offer 1 Year Amnesty Plan For Perpetrators](#)

³⁵ Five Towns Jewish Times April 29, 2009 [The Abuse Debate](#)

³⁶ Jewish Week, May 2009, [A Suspected Pedophile Eludes The System](#)

³⁷ Failedmessiah.com, May 13, 2009, [Ohel Calls For ‘Collective Action’ On Pedophile Problem](#)

³⁸ Jewish Week, April 5, 2002, [Haredi Group Balks At Clergy Law](#), Jewish Week, [Orthodox Rabbis To Report Abuse](#).

³⁹ [POSITION PAPER www.jewishadvocates.blogspot.com](#)

that sexual abuse is a crime and should be reported to law enforcement.⁴⁰ Professor Twerski defended this omission, saying “It’s a complex question of who has to report, and who is a mandated reporter. I’m not sure we could do it in that video.”

But it is hard to see how it would have taken so much time from the other important information for somebody to tell parents to call the police when their child is abused. The fact that one of the stars of the video is Rabbi Shmuel Kaminetsky whose stated public opinion as a member of the Moetzes Gedolie Yisroel of the Agudah is that abuse should be reported to rabbis and not to the police⁴¹ and that Jewish sex offenders should not have to go to jail,⁴² appears to have stopped Ohel from directly contradicting the rabbi and alienating his constituency.

22. In an article in an Agudath Israel publication, David Mandel minimized the problem of abuse in our community by falsely stating that it happens “at a much smaller number relative to the general population.”⁴³ In fact, there is no research to support this claim, and there is a mountain of research suggesting that child sexual abuse occurs with relatively similar frequency across a broad range of socioeconomic, ethnic, and racial segments of the general population.⁴⁴ The only study published thus far on the prevalence among Orthodox Jews actually shows that the statistics are in line with that of all other groups.⁴⁵ Mandel again minimized the problem by stating that the “overwhelming majority of children who are molested” will not need any professional help in coping with it, and will have no long term effects,” and “only ...a small percentage of children and adolescents are so traumatized they will need psychological treatment.”⁴⁶ He then promoted the myth that “girls who are molested as adolescents are especially vulnerable,” when current research strongly suggests that boys have their own unique psychological vulnerabilities when sexually abused, and are no less likely to be harmed.⁴⁷

While Mandel recommended “inculcating... a zero tolerance mindset into our community,” he boasted that he and Law Professor Aaron Twerski have helped Rabbanim in major Jewish communities across the country to establish ‘Batei Dinim’ to “deal specifically with allegations of child and adolescent molestation,” as opposed to advocating jail terms and probation for molesters. He argues instead, for “community supervision and treatment” done with no law enforcement involvement: “It is most important to keep the perpetrator in the community under a watchful eye, not to push them out so they can move to another community or another city and continue their horrible acts.” This, according to Mandel, rather than criminal prosecution and punishment, gives the perpetrator the best chance not to reoffend. “My colleagues and I at OHEL...[have been]...led by a ...vision and sense of communal responsibility ... [that] has enabled us to develop services in this sensitive area.”⁴⁸

⁴⁰ The Forward: <http://www.forward.com/articles/107113/#ixzz1RSMioL5i>

⁴¹ The Forward 5/2/11 [Ultra-Orthodox Group Affirms Abuse Cases Go First To Rabbi](#)

⁴² New York Times. October, 2009 [Orthodox Jews Rely More on Sex Abuse Prosecution](#)

⁴³ Jewish Observer Child Molestation in the Jewish Community, by David Mandel. September, 2007 [David Mandel of Ohel / Jewish Observer - Daas Torah](#)

⁴⁴ D. Finkelhor, The international epidemiology of child sexual abuse. [Child Abuse & Neglect Volume 18, Issue 5](#), May 1994, Pages 409-417. 2008 by the National Center for Victims of Crime. Child Sexual Abuse. www.ncvc.org.

⁴⁵ Rachel Yehuda, Ph.D. Michelle Friedman, M.D. Talli Y. Rosenbaum, P.T. Ellen Labinsky, Ph.D. James Schmeidler, Ph.D. [History of Past Sexual Abuse in Married Observant Jewish Women](#). American Journal of Psychiatry 164:11, November 2007

⁴⁶ Jewish Observer (ibid.)

⁴⁷ Hunter, M. (1990). *Abused Boys: The Neglected Victims of Sexual Abuse*. Fawcett Books, New York. Gartner, R. (1999). *Betrayed as Boys: Psychodynamic Treatment of Sexually Abused Men*. Guilford Press,

⁴⁸ Jewish Observer (ibid.)

Rabbinic endorsement of cover ups:

23. Ohel took out a full page ad in both the Jewish Week and the Jewish Press in March of 2011 in which they proclaimed that they are “not an ‘ultra-orthodox’ agency.”⁴⁹ But this seems to depend on which audience they are speaking to. In Agudas Yisroel’s publication Mandel wrote that “Ohel has been fortunate to have Harav Dovid Cohen, shlita, as our *Morah D’asra*. Our ability to speak with *Gedolei Hatorah* throughout the country provides *hadracha*.”⁵⁰ Mandel has also credited the “outspoken position of ...rabbinical authorities likeRabbi Yaakov Perlow, the Novominkser Rebbe” for bringing about change in the communities handling of sexual abuse.⁵¹ The Rebbe, who is “Nossi” or President of Agudah’s Council of Torah Sages, is viewed as public enemy number one by most survivors of abuse and their advocates because of his obstructionist policies and lack of action to promote change of any kind.⁵²

This discrepancy is a smokescreen that protects Ohel from some of the more heated criticism aimed at leaders in the Orthodox community. For example, spokesmen for Agudath Israel were roundly condemned by advocates and law enforcement officials for telling professionals who are mandated to report suspicion of child abuse to the authorities that they should first consult with a rabbi.⁵³ However, Ohel’s Rov, Rabbi Dovid Cohen wrote the same exact ruling in his chapter in Ohel’s book called “*Breaking the Silence*”. After a long discussion of why the involvement of law enforcement is necessary to protect children, Rabbi Cohen opines that the Jewish laws of *Mesira*, *Chillul Hashem*, and *Lashon Hara*, are “complex,” and when there is a question about reporting abuse, “a competent *halachic* authority” should always be consulted. And in practice, this is exactly what Ohel staff, who follow his rulings, does on a regular basis.⁵⁴

24. Furthermore, at a conference of NEFESH, the International Network of Orthodox Mental Health Professionals, in the mid 2000’s Ohel’s Rabbi, Dovid Cohen spoke about child sexual abuse, and declared that according to halacha, a girl who is 12 and a boy who is 13 are above the age of consent and therefore in a sexual relationship with an adult, both sexual partners are sinning. There was a room full of witnesses, including Dr. Carol Nadelson, MD, the past president of the American Psychiatric Association, expert on clergy sexual abuse, and a co-lecturer/panelist.

At an Ohel training for “top level therapists” in 2009 at which Dr. Reed Johnson, Ph.D. the Clinical Director of the Yale University Trauma Center lectured, Rabbi Cohen advised mandated reporters that if there is suspicion of child sexual abuse professionals should report the suspicion to a Bais Din. A clinical social worker asked a question about a case in which the head of the Bais Din was the alleged molester. Rabbi Cohen replied that he is tired of people talking about Rabbis who molest, when in fact many other people molest as well. He further stated that he is tired of hearing complaints about Rabbis who cover up for each other, because this kind of behavior is endemic to every profession. For example, it is very difficult to get a physician to testify as an expert witness against another doctor in a malpractice case.

At a recent conference in May 2011 of Agudas Yisroel for professionals, Rabbi Cohen spoke to mental health professionals about the issue of speaking *lashon hara* in therapy. While he allowed for patients to describe their abuse and other interpersonal problems in individual therapy, he forbade doing so in

⁴⁹ Ohelfamily.org: [OHEL Responds to Jewish Week Article](#), Jewish Week, March 2, 2011, [Ohel Says Jewish Week Accusations ‘Unfounded’](#)

⁵⁰ Jewish Observer (ibid.)

⁵¹ The Jewish Star, 10/28/2010. Has The Silence Been Broken: New book has some answers, but doubts linger. M. Orbach.

⁵² New York Post, July 17, 2011. [Orthodox Jews require victims to call rabbis instead of police about molestation](#)

⁵³ The Forward 5/2/11 [Ultra-Orthodox Group Affirms Abuse Cases Go First To Rabbi](#). Survivors for Justice Newsletter 6/13/11: Message from Elliot Pasik to David Zwiebel: “Resign From the New York State Bar.”

⁵⁴ Jewish Week 5/31/11 [Ohel Campaign To Bolster Image Questioned](#), Jewish Week Letter to the Editor by Dr. Brian Leggiere, Ph.D., 3/15/11 [Admires Lipner](#)

group therapy. It was pointed out to him that group therapy is a modality frequently used at from clinics especially with survivors of abuse, and that there is evidence that group therapy is sometimes the most beneficial aspect of treatment for some patients who are faced with overwhelming shame about what they have experienced. Rabbi Cohen nevertheless responded that it would be against *halacha* for people to talk about other people's wrongdoing in such a "public" forum, effectively forbidding disclosure of abuse in a group therapy.

25. In 1990, Rabbi Solomon Haffner was accused of sexually abusing a learning disabled boy he was tutoring, and he was arrested by the police. However a Beis Din convinced the grand jury that he "could not possibly have been guilty" and there were no charges filed. Ohel's Rabbi Dovid Cohen, who had originally supported the boy and his family, completely gave into community pressure, dropped his support, and actually agreed to publicly sign an apology to the Rabbi for the "false accusation". The case was written up in a peer reviewed journal as an example of corruption in law enforcement in Brooklyn's Orthodox community that puts children at risk.⁵⁵

Sins of omission

26. Two years ago a judge in Brooklyn chastised the Orthodox community for showing strong support to alleged molesters but none to the alleged victims of abuse.⁵⁶ Since that time, advocates and adult survivors from the Jewish Board of Advocates for Children, Survivors for Justice, the Voice of Justice, Yasher Koach, the Jewish Survivors Network, Sacred Lives, Jewish Parents for Safe Yeshivas and the Awareness Center, have attended dozens of court dates to show support for those who are courageous enough to come forward and name their abusers. In part because of this change, many more Orthodox Jews are feeling safer to report their abuse, in spite of the fact that rabbis and powerful communal interests are still against them doing so.

Where has Ohel been while all this has been taking place? Nowhere to be found. Total radio silence. Not a single Ohel representative, not a board member, not one of their hundreds of volunteers, not a single employee has come to a single court session to help support the victims of abuse.⁵⁷ Survivors of abuse have a difficult enough time trusting therapists in their own community where everybody knows each other. When they have reason to suspect that the agency that is supposed to be helping them does not want their abuse to be prosecuted, the conflict of interest makes it all but impossible for survivors to fully trust Ohel therapists.

27. In of 2011, a book was published co-edited by David Mandel and Dr. David Pelcovitz called "*Breaking the Silence: Sexual Abuse in the Jewish Community*".⁵⁸ It received much fanfare, but also attracted more media attention to some of the contradictions of Ohel's positions about the issue of silence regarding sexual abuse.⁵⁹

In the chapter on "*Prevention and Intervention Programs*," highly trained professionals give advice to parents that that "although there is no *halachic* problem of reporting abuse to the authorities, it is understandable that orthodox professionals who are mandated reporters nevertheless feel hindered by cultural taboo from doing so." They also admonish parents *not* to tell other parents in their child's school if molestation occurs, because it is a "private matter."

⁵⁵ Neustien, A. and Leshner, M. (October 2008) A single-case of Rabbinic sexual abuse in the Orthodox Jewish community. [*Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*](#), Vol. 17:3-4, pp. 270-289

⁵⁶ Jewish Week [Judge Lashes Out At Orthodox Community In Sex-Abuse Case; Says It Protects Abusers, Not Victims](#)

⁵⁷ Jewish Star Letters to the Editor "Angry at Ohel" October 26, 2010

⁵⁸ *Breaking the Silence: Sexual Abuse and the Jewish Community* (Ktav) edited by David Mandel and David Pelcovitz, Ph.D.

⁵⁹ [Speaking Volumes About 'Hush' Of Sexual Abuse](#) Tuesday, December 14, 2010 Hella Winston. Has The Silence Been Broken: New book has some answers, but doubts linger. M. Orbach. The Jewish Star, October 28, 2010

In the chapter on treating sexual predators, the authors ignore the experts who advocate that courts and probation departments play a particularly important role both as a motivating force, and an integral part of therapy.⁶⁰ The Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers guidelines also insist that agencies that treat offenders work closely with victim advocacy organizations to ensure that their policies do not re-traumatize victims of sexual assault,⁶¹ an idea that is neither recommended in the book, nor practiced by Ohel.

Ohel's misguided philosophy on dealing with abusers is rooted in this book to their stated belief in a "diversity of values and ends" that can create conflict among "reasonably rational, well intentioned persons...involved with sex offenders." The "relevant stakeholders" that in Ohel's opinion can "reasonably disagree on the ordering of priorities", seem to include (based on Ohel's history) the molester who has concern for his confidentiality, the molester's family who needs their breadwinner not to go to jail, the community whose image is tarnished by revelations of criminality and deviancy, and the institutions that harbor molesters who want to protect their reputations and finances from lawsuits. This ideology of complex, relative moral values completely flies in the face of both Jewish and secular law⁶² and best clinical practices⁶³ that give simple, straightforward and unequivocal directives that protection of past and future victims must be *the* primary value and consideration.

Nowhere in "*Breaking the Silence*" is the silence broken about the history of communal cover-ups in Yeshivas, youth groups and the community at large. While discussing "openly" abuse in the community, Ohel's book neglects to mention the real betrayal experienced by survivors whose victimhood has been denied, minimized, and *silenced* by establishment leaders for so long with threats and intimidation. Most survivors of abuse agree that the community response to child sexual abuse is often a worse trauma than the abuse. The parents who have had their children thrown out of yeshivas for the "crime" of disclosing abuse, the families that were literally run out of town, the children who were slapped in the face for daring to name their molester, will read this book and think "Here we go again."

⁶⁰ Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers; (2005). *Practice standards and guidelines for the evaluation, treatment and management of adult male sexual abusers*. Beaverton, Oregon. www.atsa.com/pubSoT.html

⁶¹ Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers; (2005). (ibid.)

⁶² Eidensohn, Rabbi D. *Child and Domestic Abuse; Torah, Psychological and Legal Perspectives*, (2011). Emunah Press. New York

⁶³ Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers; (2005). (ibid.)